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'Economic relations equally important'

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - While the Non-Aligned Movement was established for political reasons, the economic relations of member countries are of equal importance, particularly under the current global environment.

As such, the NAM Business Forum, to be held on Feb 23-24, will focus on the issues of strengthening bilateral co-operation, rebuilding competitiveness and sustaining economic growth.

The two-day forum will not only witness captains of industries discussing issues of common concerns, but also heads of state or government who have been invited to take part in the plenary session and luncheon address.

South African President Thabo Mbeki, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri are expected to take part in a special NAM leaders' session on "Remaking NAM, enhancing co-operation, building bridges".

Cuban President Fidel Castro is also expected to deliver a special address at the forum.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will deliver the opening address.

Another special ministerial session on "Facilitating trade and investment links among South-South countries: The Way Forward" is also part of the agenda.

The speakers include Sudan Minister of Finance and National Economy Alzubair Ahmed Elhassan, Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Arun Jaitley and South Africa's Minister of Public Enterprises Jeffrey T. Radebe.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak will present a talk on "The Malaysian Model of Development Development, Peace and Stability in Multiracial Nation."

Other topics that will be discussed include enhancing South-South countries co-operation, global governance and capacity building in the face of globalisation.

There will also be parallel sessions and sectoral workshops on smart partnership in key sectors such as energy and infrastructure, information and communications technology, capital markets and finance.

Bankers and heads of conglomerates from India, Indonesia, China, South Africa, Bangladesh and Hong Kong are expected to take part in the parallel sessions.

Asli said the NAM Business Forum would bring together entrepreneurs, captains of industry, professional and corporate managers.

Business matchmaking sessions and sectoral sessions will also facilitate business interaction and interchange of ideas and information.

"The NAM Business Forum will hopefully contribute towards a mutual sharing of common interests, hopes and opportunities for our common future," it added.